

Intermediate Architectural Design Studio

Luzbella: Envisioning a new seat of government for a future Post-Colonial Puerto Rico



(from left) Celebration after the governor's resignation July 24, 2019 (Photo by Fabian Rodríguez Torres); An empty *capitolio* awaiting the governor's speech; Map of the island of Puerto Rico by Samuel de Champlain (1599); *El Resplandor de Luzbella*, a novel by Juan López Bauzá, book cover by Gustavo Castrodad Rodríguez (2018) Editorial Planeta, Mexico

Puerto Rico, arguably the oldest colony in the western hemisphere, has gone through a lot in the last four years. For over half a century with a US Commonwealth status and a subsidized economic system, the government of Puerto Rico finally filed for bankruptcy in the fall of 2016, after a federal tax reform eliminated corporate tax incentives to US companies based on the island. That same year, a fiscal supervision board was appointed by the former US president to control Puerto Rico's finances, bringing back the return of colonial administrators to the island. Puerto Rico's infrastructure and many households were decimated by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. In the summer of 2019, two weeks of massive protests denouncing a corrupt and inept government, forced the governor to resign. Since January of 2020, new telluric faults have caused a series of major earthquakes that have rattled and destroyed the cultural heritage of many important southern coastal cities. Now the pandemic has provoked unemployment to surge to 32%. Undergoing constant crises and disasters, it is colonialism, and its effects, that inflicts the most pain and trauma on the collective consciousness of the people of Puerto Rico. This studio proposes a speculative design program to imagine and create a new space and symbol for the seat of government of a post-colonial Puerto Rico.

This architectural design studio will study the colonial history of Puerto Rico and its urban and architectural manifestations and propose and imagine a new post-colonial seat for government for the Island and its people. Students will investigate Puerto Rico's historical and present physical and socio-economic condition, make alternate site analysis, study world-wide precedents of utopian and real new nations, and propose general site strategies (regional, urban or rural), and architectural proposals for a new seat of government.

The idea for this studio is based on the novel *El Resplandor de Luzbella* by Juan López Bauzá (Planeta Editorial, Mexico, 2018) which imagines a post-colonial Puerto Rico where Puerto Ricans see themselves realized and triumphant.